2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

strangers. Indeed, it is not supposed to be seen by strangers, and these are driven away with much shouting and angry gestures; the contingency arises quite often, for the place of the sacrifice is fairly public, being situated on the open bank of an arm of the Niger, close to the landing place of a canoe ferry.

The ritual takes place in the morning and lasts about four hours. Eight elders accompany the priest to the *kuti* place, where a mound of earth has been thrown up close to the edge of the water. Water, fetched from the river in gourds, is first poured over the mound, followed by a little honey, the rest of which is thrown into the river. Then the white cock is beheaded over the mound so that his blood drips on to the earth; the head is left lying on the mound and the feathers are planted around it in a circle; this is done as a sign that the ritual has been performed and as a suggestion to passers-by to leave a gift to the spirits. A libation of beer follows, the rest of the beer being passed round among the elders. Meanwhile the preparation of the meal has begun, the cock being cooked in corngruel over an open fire; while this goes on, the old men chat freely, without any signs of awe or restraint. When the meal is done, the priest throws a few morsels on the mound and into the river, and the rest is eaten by all present. Finally, all wash their hands in the river and a last gourd of river water is poured over the mound. At each offering the priest repeats the same brief prayer, which is of the usual informal kind; one prays that God may give health, that there should be plenty of food, and that the women may have children. Though the prayer starts with the invocation of 'Father Niger' no further mention is made of the river. During the sacrifice I witnessed a sentence was added *ex tempore*—'God give health to the White Man', a reference to my recent illness. Such special appeals, I was told, were quite in order; though no individual could order the *ndáduma*, the health or fate of any member of the community (which status was accorded to me) can suitably be brought to the notice of the river spirits and of God.

(iii) *Fixed Rituals*

The *kuti mamma* is supposed to start the cycle of rites linked with the 9th month. Once more, however, the ritual time table is not rigid; the performance I saw, for example, fell on the 16th November 1934, i.e. in the middle of the 8th month in Nupe reckoning. Also it lasted one day, more precisely one night, instead of the traditional week. The ritual, which is again in the charge of the *Tswanya*, includes two distinct observances which appear to have been merged in a purely fortuitous fashion. The first, called *zumácikã* ('Back of the Bush'), is concerned with the

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

sacrifice to a *cigbe* shrine of that name, said to ward off smallpox; the other, the *mamma* proper, consists mainly in the appearance and dance of masked figures called *nāgbc*. The masks themselves are referred to as *kūyí* ('full garment') or simply as *ewo* ('dress'), and their appearance is meant to cleanse the village of evil influences. These are not further specified save negatively, in that they exclude witchcraft. The *zumácikā* is said to have been introduced by an old woman who, many years ago, happened to arrive in Jebba during a smallpox epidemic and taught the people the secret of the appropriate medicine; nothing further is known about her, about the manner of her death, or about her burial place. The medicine is contained (so it is said) in an earthen pot which now stands under a low grass roof in the middle of the village. It is in every respect an unusual version of *cigbe*. It cannot be utilized at will but only at this ceremonial; it belongs to the village and not to any individual owner; nor yet is it used in the manner of other medicines. For the substance in question is neither drunk nor otherwise applied to the body, since its effect would be deadly if it were so used; indeed no one has ever seen it. It is hidden inside the vessel, being periodically increased when blood and beer from the sacrifice are added, and its mere presence is magically effective. This effect bears on the prevention of the disease rather than its cure: smallpox is being 'kept away as you keep away a stranger'; which preventive aspect is also reflected in the date of the ritual, which falls towards the end of the cold season, while outbreaks of smallpox are believed to occur only during the hot season, in the 10th and 11th month.

The masks of the *kuti mamma*, on the other hand, are attributed, with so many other things, to Tsoede. They are made of dried grass, consisting of a skirt and a kind of veil covering face and chest, and during the year are stored in the houses of various elders. While the *cigbe* vessel stands on a public place and is in no way concealed, the masks must be kept hidden and may be put on only in a safe and secret place. The whole ritual is similarly veiled in secrecy; it takes place at night, the women having been warned to keep indoors, and out of the sight of strangers: if women or strangers were to see this *kuti*, they would be killed by its 'force'.[1]

The ceremonial I saw started about 8 p.m. on a moonless night,

[1] The fear of the *mamma* is a very real one. At the time of the performance here described the District Head from Mokwa, a Fulani nobleman, happened to stay in Jebba. He heard that a 'feast' was going to take place, and when he learned that I was going he decided to come also. He arrived when the dance was already in progress, gave one look, and literally fled. His hurried retreat was received with much hilarity by the men present, who added: 'This is how all strangers run away when they hear the *mamma*.'

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

and was performed to the light of a hurricane lamp and a number of grass torches. About forty men were assembled in front of the *cigbe* shrine. The beating of drums and a high-pitched screech of the men announced the beginning of the ritual, giving also a final warning to women who might still be abroad. The *cigbe* pot had been decorated with a strip of white cloth tied round its neck, which was referred to as the 'dress' of the vessel, that is, by the same name as the masks worn by the dancers. These appeared later, accompanied by two older men, one of them the *Ndakotsu* of the senior age grade, and some youths, all carrying sticks to drive away and beat intruders. There were two masks, worn by young men of the senior age grade, who had dressed in the presence of the *mamma* priest while he spoke this brief prayer:

'Our Lord God, let us go out (as masks); men and women (who must not see the masks), God will kill them. Now the *kuti* enters (into the masks). May God cause that the thing (i.e. smallpox and evil in general) does not stay here (in the village).

At the place of the *cigbe* shrine, the masks keep at first in the shadow without moving. The officiant kneels down in front of the *cigbe* vessel, whose lid has been removed, while the rest of the men sit around him in a triple halfcircle, the old men on the inside, younger men in the middle, youths on the outside. The man who actually performs the sacrifice is the *Ndakotsu*, since the *Tswanya* is too old and weak; but he sits immediately behind the younger man and from time to time instructs or corrects him. Throughout the proceedings the drums continue playing, and repeatedly the congregation breaks out in a high-pitched scream or calls out *'gengebaru'* (a meaningless word)—the 'greeting' of the *cigbe*.

The officiant pours some beer into the *cigbe* vessel, saying—'*Kuti*, we brew beer, we give thee water (i.e. beer), so that the town may have health, everyone may have sweet things, the women may have children, everything may prosper'. The libation is repeated three times, then the officiant drinks a little of the beer and pours the rest into the *cigbe* vessel. He kills a black male kid, slitting its throat, and lets the blood run into the vessel. The body of the animal is removed to be roasted over an open fire while the libation of beer is repeated, the same prayer being now spoken by the old men, one after the other. Finally, the beer goes round according to age and rank, the *Tswanya* drinking first. The men clearly enjoy drinking the beer and behave much as they would at any ordinary drinking party. This concludes the first phase of the ceremonial; the proceedings that follow belong to the *mamma* proper.

They begin with singing and a slow and dignified dance of a few old men. The masks soon join in, being acclaimed with shouts of

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

'mamari', the 'greeting' of the *mamma* masks. Later the masks, accompanied by all the young men, set out on a dance-procession through the village, where they beat with their sticks on the doors of houses, to frighten all evil persons (and all women). On the way they 'salute' the houses of chief and elders and also look out for strangers who might have strayed into the village. The dance procession is repeated several times, and on every return the masks join in the singing and dancing, which become more and more general. Let me stress that the dance preserves its restrained and quiet character throughout, the occasional shrieks notwithstanding. Altogether, the general mood is neither excited nor severe. The men who stay behind at the *cigbe* shrine, if they do not dance, talk in whispers but quite informally, about previous performances of the *kuti*, about old times, and so forth; one of the elders takes the opportunity of telling me about the meaning and rules of the *mamma*. Some time during the dance the meal has been prepared and is eaten by the congregation after some morsels of food are dropped into the *cigbe* vessel. It is by then 11 o'clock. There is no washing of hands, and no other formal conclusion of the sacrifice. Singing and dancing, and the drinking of beer while it lasts, go on in the same manner until dawn, though some old men, tired out, have fallen asleep. In the morning, the men return to their houses to sleep, while the womenfolk, now released from the night's prohibition, set about their day's work. Formerly, I was told, this went on for a whole week, with dancing at night and rest during the day.

796 X
751 ●
535

The songs sung during the *mamma* refer, on the whole vaguely and obscurely, to the ceremonial and its rules, though the text is interspersed with meaningless words.

796 X
751
539

1

The person who offends the *mamma*,
He (the *mamma*) will hear it and tell it
(i.e. the person will be punished with death).

2

The *mamma* instructs the masks;
it is closed to the uninitiated.

3

The masks, *woro woro*,
The masks kill (evil) people,
Eyeh——

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

X796
751
539

4

Arato, one makes the *mamma*,
Arato, the drum of *mamma* (is playing).
By night, the drum of *mamma* is speaking.

5

They are making the *mamma* with it together,
They are making the *mamma* with it together
('it' refers to the *kuti*, the phrase meaning—
in the ceremonial masks and *kuti* are one).

X796
751

The people have no theory why the cult should be particularly frightening to the women; on the contrary, they emphasize that the *mamma* is meant to frighten all evil doers and deny that it has any bearing on witchcraft (which is wielded essentially by women). Yet the cult is clearly the men's secret and seems to express male dominance and some antagonism between the sexes. Oddly enough, one of the ritual paraphernalia, the smallpox medicine, is described as a woman's gift. But let me leave this point for the moment and only point out that the *mamma*, which cleanses the community from evil influences, fittingly initiates the cycle of rites meant to procure more positive benefits—timely floods, as in the *ndáduma*, or health and fertility, as in the *dzakó*.

X796

The latter ritual is supposed to succeed the *mamma* by ten days, though the performance I witnessed took place seventeen days later, on 3rd December. The *dzakó* is performed in public, without secrecy, in front of the sacred relics of Tsoede, two bronze figures of a man and a woman. Special musical instruments are used, two gourd rattles, and three drums hung with brass bells and other ornaments again attributed to Tsoede. The congregation during the sacrifice itself consists of the thirteen elders of Jebba, as usual bareheaded and stripped to the waist, and carrying long staves; but other men and women, even children, may watch and will later join in the dance. The officiant of the ritual is the *Ndace* (the 'Father of Hunting'), though the ritual has nothing to do with hunting. Nor has the rank itself this particular connotation. In Jebba, it is an elder's rank among others, though one specifically connected with the relics of Tsoede; for the *Ndace* is one of the four men who serve (or used to serve) as the 'executioners' wielding the Chain of Tsoede.

[534]

The ceremonial starts in the afternoon, with a sacrifice in front of the bronze figures, during which the officiant has the two rattle players on his right and left. The place on the priest's left, opposite the female figure, signifies 'birth', the place on his right, opposite the male figure, 'health'; which symbolism of right and left is

[p. 94]

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

or by preparing a potion from bits of earth extracted from a termite mound. For severe headache one applies an ointment to the eyes, compounded of the dried kernels of a fruit tree, the bark from the roots of another, cloves, and powdered antimony. Sometimes headache is treated quasi-surgically, by a species of bleeding; the barber makes a number of fine incisions into the patient's forehead and then rubs a paste of dried locust-beans and natron into the cuts. The counter-irritation thus induced may well offer a temporary relief, though the bleeding itself is probably too slight to have any effect; the cure, however, has an odd conclusion, the patient's head being knocked gently three times against the wall.

Ulcers and wounds are treated with powdered bark or roots, used either dry or damp, and left on the wound for two to three days. Broken limbs are first massaged with a salve made of palm-oil and the dried and powdered leaves of a certain tree (another remedy including dirt from a hen house and charred earth from a termite mound), after which one applies a ligature of rope, using four sticks as splints. The ligature is removed after three days, but the massage with the ointment is continued. If the fracture does not heal, this treatment is followed up with a 'stronger' one, to wit, a massage with snake poison. For smallpox one gives a potion made of the pods of a certain vine growing in the bush. There is also a 'prophylactic' treatment, applied when an epidemic is threatening; it consists either in drinking an infusion of the bark of the locust-bean tree, boiled together with some grains of sorghum or millet, or in fumigating the house, at night, by burning certain herbs. Pounded hibiscus seeds, taken like snuff, are given to patients suffering from asthma. For fever accompanied by rigor (malaria?) one drinks the boiled juice of the pawpaw mixed with natron; a more 'magical' cure consists in inhalations of the fumes from three ingredients burned together in an old, broken pot (never a new one)—a powdered herb, the swamp plant mentioned before, and twigs taken from a vulture's nest. We shall meet again with this predilection for old pots when discussing the medicines of the *cigbeci* experts; the vulture plays a part also in another remedy of the barber-doctors, applied to sore eyes: they are bathed in ash-water mixed with a pulverized vulture's leg. Other herbal concoctions are used in the treatment of gonorrhœa (called *tswashi*), syphilis (called *tunjeri*), and sleeping sickness; these remedies are similar in that the first two are said to increase the typical secretion until 'the whole disease leaves the body', while the last brings on diarrhœa, the germs of the disease being passed with the stool. Lunacy of a non-violent nature may be treated by means of inhalations, repeated several times day and night, or by

278 789 either with or without specified actions and utterances. Their avowed purposes are frequently therapeutic, but also include defences against theft, witchcraft, and devices to render one invisible. Nupe leech-lore includes both rational empirical cures and mystical rites which can produce no result beyond increasing the confidence of the user. Nor is there any distinction in Nupe vocabulary, for the term *cigbe* is used for all medicines. Medicines may be distinguished as those which are practically effective or may be easily taken as being effective by practitioners, and those whose objective irrationality cannot be mistaken. The latter class may include devices for rendering a man invisible, medicines for killing thieves and fending off witchcraft, and for making hoes do their work in half the normal time.

791 759 306 There are four main types of practitioners of medicine: the guild of Moslem barber-doctors, the pagan order of *cigbeciži*, and two kinds of individual practitioners.

The barber-doctors' guild is recognized by the *Etsu* Nupe but is confined almost entirely to the towns. The guild head occupies an important position at court. They are entirely concerned with therapeutic medicines, but are regarded with contempt in the country districts where people feel that a barber cannot know about such things.

791 789 The *cigbeciži*, formerly recognized by the *Etsu*, but since replaced by the barber-doctors, are much more loosely organized than the guild. Whereas the latter keep their knowledge mainly within their lineages, the *cigbeciži* crafts can be bought by anyone. There is little corporate activity beyond occasional gatherings at the local head's house to discuss practice. The head is traditionally responsible for all new medicines. Offerings are made to the spirits of the order and through them to *Sokó*, the ultimate source of *cigbe*, whenever a new medicine is discovered. The names of spirits may also be introduced in the application of medicines, but there appears to be no invocation. With this mystical approach there is a greater sense of the implications of "medicine" for good and for evil. While Moslem barbers, though not concerned with the more "dangerous" medicines, sell without scruple medicines for immoral purposes, such as those to induce barrenness in women, *cigbeciži* claim to be very particular as to whom they sell the more powerful *cigbe*. The powers of witchcraft are often said to require medicines, while the conflict between witchcraft and anti-witchcraft is sometimes represented as a struggle between good and bad *cigbe*.

Individual practitioners are of two kinds: those who provide cures for petty ailments, and Moslem mallams and scholars who write a passage from the Koran which is washed off and drunk by the patient. They also provide amulets containing Koran texts, as elsewhere in Islamic West Africa.

Some medicines, the ingredients of which are not known, belong to descent groups and are kept in vessels into which libations of beer and offerings of blood are poured to the ancestors.

754 751 The neophyte to the order of witches as imagined by the Nupe must, it is believed, bathe himself in certain medicines and observe certain taboos, and the masked dancer who impersonates and is possessed by the spirit of the anti-witchcraft society[10] uses certain medicines while others are placed on the mask to give it and its dancer their unique character. There are in addition individual medicines used as defences against magic, and ordeal medicines which will kill the witch who drinks, but leave the innocent unharmed.

Divination[11]

787 Divination plays an important part in Nupe life and is used not only to determine the rites to be performed in particular situations but to decide such matters as the election of a high officer of state. The two methods used are the old system,

[10] See below.
[11] Nadel, 1942, p. 379; 1954a, pp. 36–67.